



CDSS

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
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GAVIN NEWSOM  
GOVERNOR

March 15, 2019

Jesse Russell, President  
Big Picture Research and Consulting  
California Citizen Review Panels  
11865 Fir Drive  
Reno, NV 89431

Dear Mr. Russell:

The report from the California Citizen Review Panels (CRP) on Prevention, Children and Family Services and Critical Incidents Report for state fiscal year 2017-18 has been received and accepted by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

The CDSS would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the CRPs for the time and energy dedicated to investigating focus areas related to the subjects of prevention, children and family services, and critical incidents. The CDSS recognizes that this is the first Annual Report submitted by the three new statewide CRPs, and that a great deal of effort has gone into the creation and maintenance of these panels. The Annual Report demonstrates a thoughtful attempt to effectively promote the strategies which will best contribute to the overall and long term well-being, safety and permanence of children and families in California.

The CDSS acknowledges the following CRP recommendations and provides responses in the enclosed document.

It has been a pleasure to work with the CRPs to address child welfare statewide and we are happy to further discuss our responses. Should you have any questions or comment, please contact Alex Farrell, OCAP CRP Contract Manager, at (916) 657-1997.

Sincerely,

Gregory E. Rose  
Deputy Director

Enclosure

c: Erin Manske, Project Coordinator  
Nancy Miller, Project Coordinator

## **California Statewide Citizen Review Panels Recommendation Responses**

### **Prevention Citizen Review Panel**

The Prevention Citizen Review Panel recommends that:

1. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) recognize and promote Family Resource Centers (FRCs) as the priority delivery network of the state's prevention services.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS agrees that organic prevention network that exists with over 500 FRCs across the state of California. Through the use of the document *Vehicles for Change Volume II*, CDSS is working to uplift this network of family support organizations by validating the growth of this field and supporting further growth through technical assistance and capacity building. The CDSS is also encouraging the unification of these organizations through a statewide Family Resource Association, shared language, and a clear understanding of what it means to be a FRC. Lastly, CDSS is looking for ways to evaluate the impact of FRCs across the state. The CDSS would welcome additional suggestions in order to continue to increase the visibility and strength of FRCs.

2. The CDSS identifies and promotes FRCs as stakeholders in relevant initiatives and projects across all family serving state agencies.

**CDSS Response:** At the state level, CDSS has been advocating for FRCs to be included in relevant initiatives including the Essentials for Childhood Initiative, the 2019 Prevention Summit, and the recent grant application by the Department of Education for the Federal Preschools Development Grant. The CDSS also includes FRC leadership on many of its advisory panels including the CRPs, the Prevention and Early Intervention workgroup, and the Prevention Cabinet. The CDSS has invited FRCs to provide input into the Families First Prevention Services Act legislation. The FRCs also participate in the statewide Learning Communities and Champions Meetings organized by Strategies 2.0. The CDSS will continue to promote FRCs as stakeholders, as is appropriate.

3. The CDSS improves communication channels by including FRCs when the agency sends communications to counties, including FRCs in CDSS planning and system improvement initiatives, and promoting FRCs in the development of county prevention plans.

**CDSS Response:** Currently, FRCs are listed in the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) manual to include in county prevention planning. The CDSS is currently in the process of updating this manual and will incorporate additional promotion of FRCs being involved in prevention planning. The CDSS is

also co-hosting a Prevention Summit on January 31, 2019 and February 1, 2019. This summit will bring together county teams for prevention planning purposes, and FRCs are encouraged to be part of those county teams. Lastly, FRCs are welcome to subscribe to CDSS's Letters and Notices mailing list. By signing-up for this list, all subscribers will be aware of office guidance provided to the counties by CDSS. Current letters and notices, and the option to subscribe to the mailing list, can be found at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Letters-and-Notices>. The CDSS will commit to sharing this subscription information through the Office of Child Abuse Prevention's (OCAP) newsletter.

4. The CDSS relies on FRCs as conduits to families and communities by involving FRCs in outreach.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS has partnered with the Child Abuse Prevention Center to plan and host Kids' Day at the Capitol, an annual event promoting Child Abuse Prevention Month. The FRCs are encouraged to participate in this outreach event. Further, awards are given to agencies and parents making a difference in the lives of children and families. The CDSS also creates toolkits for Parent Leadership Month and for Child Abuse Prevention Month and requests that FRCs play a key role in identifying parent leaders, promoting parent leadership and sharing information around Child Abuse Prevention Month. The CDSS would welcome feedback regarding additional ways that FRCs could be further involved in outreach efforts.

5. The CDSS ensures that the child welfare field receives training and support in implementing the Vehicles for Change vision to strengthen and improve FRC structure and service delivery.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS is funding Strategies 2.0 to further support in-person training and implementation of the Vehicles for Change vision. This training should be rolled-out in 2019-20.

### **Children and Family Services Citizen Review Panel**

The Children and Family Services Citizen Review Panel recommends that:

1. The CDSS and the Administrative Office of the Courts, through the Court Improvement Program, appoint a joint task force, with representation from courts, advocates, child welfare, non-agency partners, caregivers, and family and child stakeholders to improve visitation practice statewide by:
  - a. compiling data, across counties, of current visitation practice, specifically, how visitation plans are developed, monitored, and updated on a regular basis, barriers counties face in providing reasonable family visitation, and whether courts are including visitation in their determination of reasonable efforts.
  - b. reviewing research findings and best practice developed by other states and;

- c. based on that review, develop best practice guidance related to family visitation to include:
- d.
  - i. development of sample case specific visitation plans for the case carrying social worker/probation officer in conjunction with the Child and Family Teams with parents and caregivers;
  - ii. guidance on social worker/probation officer assessment of the safety threat during a visit to determine the level of supervision needed; and
  - iii. guidance for the social worker/probation officer should discuss and update visitation plans at each required monthly visit with parents and the child.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS supports the recommendation that a workgroup composed of representatives from CDSS, Administrative Office of the Courts, advocates, child welfare, probation, caregivers and other stakeholders be formed to implement change and provide improved guidance in practice for county placement agencies and the courts where a best practice guide may be developed.

The CDSS requests some language changes to these recommendations from the Citizen Review Panel. The CDSS recommends the following language be accepted:

- a. Conducting a scan across counties of current visitation practices, specifically, how visitation plans are developed, monitored, and updated on a regular basis, barriers counties face in providing adequate visitation, and whether courts are including visitation in their determination of reasonable efforts;
  - b. Reviewing research findings and best practices developed by other states and;
  - c. Based on that review, developing policy and guidance related to visitation to include:
    - i. development of case specific visitation plans with parents and caregivers;
    - ii. guidance on worker assessment of the safety threat during a visit to determine the level of supervision needed; and
    - iii. policy that specifies workers are to discuss and update visitation plans at each required monthly visit by caseworkers with parents.
2. The CDSS issue an All County Information Notice providing guidance on developing visitation plans, specifically noting that:
- a. all families' needs and risks are unique, and no county should have a standardized visitation protocol for all families, regardless of their individual needs and circumstances;
  - b. initial case planning meetings should dedicate sufficient time for development of a case specific visitation plan and;

- c. visitation plans should be discussed and updated at every required monthly meeting between the caseworker and each parent.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS recognizes the need for improved practice across the state for family visitation. In accordance with recent legislation, MPP Division 31-206.32 and ACL 16-84, visitation between the child and parent is to be discussed during the Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting, as the CFT drives the case plan.

As suggested in the previous recommendation, a workgroup would develop a best practice guide. The workgroup should consider noting the following:

- a. all families' needs and risks are unique and no county should have a standardized visitation protocol for all families, regardless of their individual needs and circumstances;
- b. the initial Child and Family Team meeting should dedicate sufficient time for development of a case specific visitation plan;
- c. visitation plans should be discussed and updated at every required monthly meeting between the social worker/probation officer and each parent and child; and
- d. the CDSS will provide technical assistance to county placement agencies from the Concurrent Planning and Policy Unit of the Children and Youth Policy Branch.

The dissemination of this guide would be provided to county placement agencies through an All County Information Notice (ACIN) issued by the CDSS.

3. The CDSS to review the visitation training provided through the Core Curriculum and ensure it is aligned with policy and guidance developed as a result of the joint task force and All County Information Notice, including specifics about developing and regularly updating family visitation plans based on whether the child can be safe during a visit.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS Common Core is the foundational training for all child welfare social workers and probation officers. The curriculum is not meant to provide information regarding mandatory procedures for specific county cultures and practices. The current curriculum includes training on family engagement, safety planning and teaming, all of which are deeply engrained with components of Safety Organized Practice (SOP) and the California Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM), which speaks to best practices associated with family visitation. It is important to note, that currently there is significant curriculum revision underway to include material covering CFT and the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment, which impacts and directs the discussion for family visitation while also considering safety and risk. As of this writing, CDSS is unable to commit to how the curriculum could be enhanced that would be specific enough to the meet

this recommendation, but would be willing to receive further recommendations from the CRP regarding best practices.

### **Critical Incidents Citizen Review Panel**

The Critical Incidents Citizen Review Panel recommends that:

1. The CDSS work with county child welfare agencies to train mandated reporters not only to recognize suspected child abuse and neglect but also to understand how to make a report that will rise to the level of a child protective services investigation, if appropriate.

**CDSS Response:** Although CDSS does not have authority to require county child welfare agencies to participate in a state-designed training for mandated reporters, CDSS' OCAP has contracted with Abilaire Solutions Ltd. to redesign the OCAP's existing online Mandated Reporter Training to make it more engaging and easy to navigate. Once the redesign is complete, free online modules for the following professionals will be available in addition to a general training module for all mandated reporters: school personnel, child care provider, medical professional, mental health professional/social worker, law enforcement and clergy. In addition, a condensed version of the general training module will be available for volunteers. The training will provide detailed descriptions regarding how to identify suspected child abuse and neglect, describes how to file a report and what information that report should contain.

All updated modules are expected to be available in early 2019. While the redesign of the Mandated Reporter Training is underway, the OCAP will ensure that the existing training remains available for those who wish to access it. The existing training and updated training will both be located at [www.mandatedreporter.ca.com](http://www.mandatedreporter.ca.com).

Finally, the OCAP is exploring the creation of a free curriculum organizations may use to hold in-person trainings for mandated reporters that will be based on the content of the online training modules.

2. The CDSS will work with institutions of higher education to include mandated reporter training in curricula that will result in students entering a field in which they will become mandated reporters (i.e. medical schools, law schools, social work programs, public health programs, corrections and law enforcement programs, teaching programs, nursing programs, and others).

**CDSS Response:** California's Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (Penal Code 11164-11174.3) does not require students to obtain training regarding mandated reporting prior to employment. Therefore, CDSS does not have authority to require higher education institutions to include this type of content in their curricula. However, CDSS does recommend the inclusion of this training when possible, and will continue to advocate for it, as appropriate. As an example, the OCAP recently

worked with the Resources Development and Training Support Bureau to submit a proposal to the California Social Work Education Center to modify Common Core Training for students of social work to include a brief overview of mandated reporting responsibilities.

3. The CDSS works with the State Department of Education to ensure that all employees are trained uniformly as mandated reporters with minimum standards for those training programs (for example, eight-minute videos to meet this mandate should not be allowed).

**CDSS Response:** The OCAP has partnered with the California Department of Education (CDE) to review and refine the redesigned online Mandated Reporter Training. All Local Educational Agency (LEA) employees are required to take this training annually. The LEAs may use a separate training but must report which training was used to the CDE. The CDSS does not have authority to change the procedures of CDE, but will commit to sharing this panel's recommendations with that department.

#### **Other Comments:**

1. Reconstitute and sustain a State Child Death Review Team (CDRT) with a clear charter and purpose to connect with local child death review teams to ensure consistent practice, analyze trends, and take bold action to end child fatalities and near fatalities in California.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS recognizes the value of a State Child Death Review Team and the possibility of such a team improving California's child death review and prevention system. However, reconvening such a team currently lies outside the jurisdiction of CDSS and would require a change in statute and/or funding allocation.

2. "The partners" work together to develop consistent evidence-informed criteria for local child death review teams to follow so all child death review teams utilize a standard protocol and information is consistently reported to the state.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS is in agreement that a standardized protocol would be useful for all local child death review teams. This recommendation is currently a strategy of the Critical Incident Workgroup (CIW), a subgroup of the State Interagency Team (SIT). The CIW is convened by CDSS and engages partners from the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Justice, the California First 5 Commission, local CDRTs, local child welfare agencies, local law enforcement agencies, and others. This recommendation would best be implemented by a state child death review team, if reconvened.

3. The CDSS to review and consider information from the National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention, information from other states, and information from

exemplary California county child death review teams to learn what has been studied and what has been effective in fatality review to provide guidance to the partners in developing evidence informed practices.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS is currently reviewing materials from the National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention, information from other states and information from exemplary California county child death review teams as a part of the work done with the CIW. This recommendation would best be implemented by a state child death review team, if reconvened.

4. The CDSS should report the actual number of fatalities that occur in a calendar year rather than the number of reports they receive to get clearer longitudinal data.

**CDSS Response:** This recommendation has been implemented and is available here on the CDSS Critical Incident Oversight and Support Unit website.

5. "The partners" work together to develop and pilot consistent criteria for designating a case as a fatality or near fatality and reporting of same by law enforcement, child welfare, and the coroner's office. The following are necessary to understand the patterns across the state: clear definitions about child abuse/neglect as a material cause; improvements to the process, data collection, and reporting of child abuse and neglect fatalities and near fatalities; and consistent reporting.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS is very interested in developing consistent criteria for designating a case as a fatality or near fatality, and has therefore focused on this recommendation as a current strategy of the CIW. The CDSS also conducts monthly webinars with county child welfare agencies to support accurate child fatality and near fatality reporting to CDSS. Prior webinars have included topics regarding the importance of relationship-building with local partners, including law enforcement agencies and coroners' offices. Such local partners have been, and will continue to be, invited to webinars when relevant topics are discussed.

6. Local child death review teams be designated as determiners of whether abuse or neglect was a material cause for a fatality or near fatality.

**CDSS Response:** California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 10850.4 requires that a law enforcement agency, a coroner's office, or a child welfare agency must make a determination that abuse or neglect was a material contributing factor in a child fatality in order for that fatality to be reported to CDSS. The CDSS works collaboratively with county child welfare agencies to strengthen their relationships with local partners. Adding a child death review team to the list of the aforementioned determining agencies would require a change in statute, but would likely increase local collaboration and partnerships, thereby increasing reporting accuracy.



7. The CDSS reviews the reports of the local child death review team when they are reviewing fatalities. The CDSS aggregate the findings of the local review teams so that more accurate numbers and trends can be established.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS understands the value of having the most accurate data possible, and has therefore requested data and reports from local child death review teams to reconcile the number of abuse and neglect related child fatalities in the CDRT data with the SOC 826 forms reported to CDSS. However, not all counties have active CDRTs and not all CDRTs consistently collect data, which reduces the reliability of the data. The CDSS hopes to establish a data-sharing agreement with the California Department of Public Health (and local CDRTs) to reconcile such data against other data sources accessible by CDSS.

8. "The partners" work together to review child death review practice in other states and adopt a consistent and effective model.

**CDSS Response:** This recommendation is currently a strategy of the CIW, a subgroup of the SIT. The CIW is convened by CDSS and engages partners from CDPH, the California Department of Justice, the California First 5 Commission, local CDRTs, local child welfare agencies, local law enforcement agencies, and others. This recommendation would best be implemented by a state child death review team, if reconvened. The CDSS commits to sharing all recommendations made in this report with the Critical Incident Workgroup.

9. The state recommits to the responsibility of child welfare, the coroner's office, and law enforcement to cross report fatalities and near fatalities. The Panel recommends the partners conduct an assessment of the actual cost to make this happen and reallocate such funding.

**CDSS Response:** California Penal Code section 11174.34(k), requiring law enforcement agencies and child welfare agencies to cross-report to one another all cases of child death suspected to be related to child abuse or neglect, was suspended by the Commission on State Mandates in 2013. Cost estimates are included in the reference documentation. Requiring agencies to cross-report would require a change in statute and/or funding allocation. Currently, ACL 18-12 addresses the county-optional block grant used to fund activities identified as reimbursable by the Commission on State Mandates (Commission) under the Inter-Agency Council on Child and Neglect Investigation Reports (CSM-00-TC-22) mandate.

10. All counties empanel local child death review teams, pursuant to California Penal Code 11174.32 et seq, that operate in a consistent manner and report data consistently to the state.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS supports this recommendation and understands the value of local CDRTs improving California's child death review and prevention

system. The CDSS also understands the barriers of implementing this recommendation due to the cost counties would incur. Such a recommendation lies outside the jurisdiction of CDSS and would likely require a change in statute and/or funding allocation.

11. Counties require cross reporting among law enforcement, child welfare, and the coroner's office to ensure all fatalities and near fatalities are so designated.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS supports and encourages this recommendation at a county level. Currently, ACL 18-12 addresses the county-optional block grant used to fund activities identified as reimbursable by the Commission on State Mandates (Commission), including optional cross-reporting, under the ICAN Investigation Reports (CSM-00-TC-22) mandate.

12. Local teams provide their findings to CDSS and CDSS consider those findings when conducting a child death review.

**CDSS Response:** The CDSS supports this recommendation. The CDSS has requested data and reports from local child death review teams to reconcile the number of abuse and neglect related child fatalities in the CDRT data with the SOC 826 forms reported to CDSS. However, not all counties have active CDRTs and not all CDRTs consistently collect data, which reduces the reliability of the data. The CDSS also hopes to establish a data-sharing agreement with the California Department of Public Health (and local CDRTs) to reconcile such data against other data sources accessible by CDSS.